TL 4189

ADDRESS TO NATIONAL EAST TIMOR ACTIVISTS CONFERENCE

CIDAC
Centro de Documentação

SENATOR GORDON D. McINTOSH

Friends of East Timor

Firstly, let me say I am pleased to be here. Whilst I was only made aware of this conference less than two weeks ago, there is no way I would have missed the opportunity to attend. The issue of East Timor and the need to discuss methods of support for the East Timorese are of vital importance. I congratulate the organisers for convening a meeting such as this.

As you are all aware, there was no resolution on East Timor for discussion by the United Nations in 1983. The moves to defer discussion until 1984 had been made by the time I arrived in New York as a representative of the Australian Parliament to the United Nations, on September 19th last year.

In formal terms, Norway moved that the question be deferred in the light of the failure of the U.N. Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly on East Timor. He had been required by the 1982 Resolution to - and I quote- "initiate consultation with all parties directly concerned with a view to exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem" - unquote.

In August, however, he proposed to hold over his report because of what he called "recent developments". While these "recent developments" were not specified, they were most likely a reference to informal talks which had occurred between Portugal and Indonesia, in New York.

These formal moves, of course, are merely the public diplomatic result of the aims and activities of interested parties at the United Nations, I believe that the decision to defer debate was arrived at because of the nervousness of the Indonesian Government and those governments supporting the right of East Timorese self-determination. Neither side was confident of a favourable result.

Jakarta had been working hard during 1983 to win votes on the issue. According to the Jakarta Post of 22nd September, 1983, Foreign Minister Mochtar had personally visited the Solomons, Fiji, Western Samoa, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, as well as the scandinavian countries of Norway and Denmark to - quote - "explain Indonesia's position" - unquote - to those countries. This was also the mission of special envoys sent to the African countries of Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Togo. There were similar missions to latin American countries such as Columbia, Haiti and Jamaica. I have listed these countries to give you an idea of what supporters of East Timorese self-determination are up against. For all that, and despite confident utterances by Indonesian officials, they were clearly worried that a vote would be taken.

Fretilin Representative Jose Ramos Horta and Representatives of countries such as Vanuatu were also nervous that the issue might be lost. But there was no clear evidence that this would have been the case. Such feelings are essentially based on what could only called "diplomatic gossip" - of which, I can assure you, there is no shortage at the United Nations.

The moves to hold discussion over on the issue would also have been favoured by those governments which hope that a deferral would allow it to be quietly shelved and fade away. Sad to say, but the country which is most vital to the retention of the issue on the U.N. Agenda ... Australia ... must, I believe, be seen to be at the forefront of this group.

It is not news to any of you here that the issue of self-determination remains on the United Nations Agenda by a very slender thread. In itself, this is a tragedy and a travesty of justice because all countries of the world know that

there has been no act of self-determination in East Timor. The fifty or so countries which have abstained from voting on East Timor Resolutions in recent years could better help the Timorese by voting for the Resolution. Nonetheless, their abstention means they are not prepared to accord legal endorsement to Indonesia's annexation.

There are a few countries which, for reasons best known to themselves, claim that the East Timorese have chosen to be part of Indonesia. Be that as it may, key supporters of the Indonesian takeover, such as the U.S.A. and Australia, have acknowledged there has been no act of self-determination in the territory. If the issue does go off the U.N. Agenda, it will be much more difficult, if not impossible - in the short term at least - to build international support for self-determination in East Timor. In the eyes of the world, time will start to legitimise the incorporation - even though that act was , and will remain, illegal.

There will be another result. Indonesian officials privately admit that the Indonesian economic programs in East Timor are designed to win international diplomatic support for the incorporation. If the issue does go off the Agenda, I have little doubt that the so-called "special treatment" would rapidly decrease and the East Timorese would be much more vulnerable to the whims of a military-based administration which has already amply demonstrated its ability to cause massive suffering for the East Timorese people. And if I was a Papua New Guinean, or a WestPapuan, I would be very nervous at the prospect of the successful removal of East Timor from the U.N. Agenda. A number of commentators have likened the Australian stand on East Timor to the appeasement of Munich. I feel it is a valid comparison.

So, one of the questions for us here is what can be done to ensure that the issue of East Timorese self-determination does remain on the U.N. Agenda. I don't claim to have all the answers to that question but I would like to offer this suggestion as a result of discussion I had at the United Nations. It concerns the basic issue of information.

I was able to identify two clear problems with the availability of information for government missions to the United Nations. The first is that, despite all the work that is done here in Australia - and by groups and individuals overseas - to obtain and circulate information on developments in East Timor, the fact is that quite a number of nations supporting the East Timor issue are not adequately briefed. You only have to read the speeches at the U.N. to see that these governments are maintaining their support with facts and arguments which could be greatly added to and improved. This is not to detract from the work of Fretilin Representatives at the United Nations ... especially Jose Ramos Horta. Jose has a reputation as one of the hardest and most effective workers at the UN. There are, however, limits to what the Fretilin Representatives can do.

This brings me to the second problem - and it concerns the source of the material on East Timor. An important delegate from a country which has abstained from voting since 1979 was very pleased to get a copy of the report of the Senate Inquiry into East Timor because it was from a source other than the Fretilin Representative, or, indeed, the Indonesian government. In his view, information from sources other than the main protagonists, is of great value. However, we should look very carefully at the content of such information and the way in which it is distributed because therein lies an effective instrument for gaining positive results at the United Nations.

Needless to say, it is not sufficient just to get information to the missions of governments at the UN. Ideally, information should be getting to important governments through visits to the countries or through groups and individuals in the respective countries. It might not be possible to take on the world but we can do something and I would suggest that the Pacific is an obvious and important area.

Of the South Pacific Nations, only Vanuatu has maintained a clear principled policy in defence of the rights of the East Timorese, and it deserves congratulations and support for this stand. Unlike Vanuatu, however, the other South Pacific States appear to be wavering under a likely combination of pressure from Australia and promises of additional aid from Indonesia to support the Indonesian claim on Timor. I don't have to remind you that Indonesia is itself a major recipient of Australian and other government economic aid. I also believe, however, that the matter has not been settled in either Western Samoa or the Solomons. The work of committed people in New Zealand has resulted in the re-emergence of the issue of the issue of East Timor in that country. I also believe that we should not neglect Papua New Guinea.

Despite public statements from successive P.N.G. Governments that good relations exist between Jakarta and Port Moresby, worry about Indonesia is a fact of life at all levels of Papua New Guinean society. This was most recently demonstrated by the statement of a now former P.N.G. Defence Minister in Canberra last year that P.N.G. expected to be invaded by Indonesia within twenty years. I believe their fears are real. Papua New Guineans will gain the courage to speak out if they receive from us ... their neighbours ... the necessary comfort and moral support.

As to how this process of informing the peoples and governments of the South Pacific Nations might be implemented, I understand that Fretilin may appoint an envoy to be based in the region. This would be a useful move and it should be supported. Another thought is that church bodies in these countries may be receptive to playing a role. Hopefully the visit to those countries last year by Monsignor Da Costa Lopes may have sown some seeds in this direction.

Regrettably, my visit to the United Nations did not reveal any major plans or new initiatives that individual or groups of countries might be taking in support of the East Timorese. However, important work is being done in the USA and a number of European countries. In particular, I would draw your attention to petitions signed by politicians in the U.S. and in Europe. On December 15th last year, a Bipartisan Group of 105 US Congressmen wrote to President Reagan expressing concern at the new Indonesian military offensive. Members of Parliament of eight out of ten EEC countries have called on European governments to work collectively for East Timorese self-determination. For your interest, I have here multiple copies of these petitions.

I would also draw your attention to a report in 'The Australian' of 20th January, 1984, which indicated that the British Government may urge the UN Secretary-General to consult with Fretilin inside East Timor. I am currently seeking further information on this rather sketchy but interesting report. At face value, and if it is correct, this would seem to be an important development. Previously, the United Kingdom has abstained from voting or taking any initiatives in support of East Timor's case.

Before moving on to some comments on the Australian Government, mention should be made of Portugal. It has always been difficult to work out what successive Portuguese Governments aims on East Timor really were. Between 1980 and 1982, it did seem that the then Conservative Government was trying to gain diplomatic support for some solution ... but with little success. My clear impression from a conversation with a senior Portuguese Diplomat at the UN was that the present government is trying to pour oil on troubled waters while wanting to be seen to be fulfilling its moral and legal responsibilities. It is certain that there have been some confidential discussions between Indonesian and Portuguese officials in New York. I understand Portugal decided not to petition the UN Committee of 24 to preserve these discussions.

I also understand, however, that the Lisbon Government believes Portuguese public opinion would not accept a settlement without an act of self-determination.

The government is also conscious of the requirements of its own constitution, which calls for East Timorese self-determination. It is possible that if the present Portuguese Government received support from other countries instead of advice to avoid debate, it might stay on the straight and narrow. It is fairly certain that Portugal has sought advice, if not support, from the Australian Government, There are no signs that Portugal has received encouragement from Canberra to pursue a just course.

It is at this point I would like to discuss the international importance of Australia on the East Timor issue. When my colleague, Ken Fry, went to the United Nations in April 1976 to address the UN Security Council on East Timor, he learned that many countries were looking to Australia for a lead. If Australia had supported the East Timorese, many other countries, notably West European, would have followed. I am in no doubt that the same is true today.

The Australian position is vital to the fate of the East Timor issue and that places a heavy responsibility on us as Australians. Successful work for the implementation of Australian Government policy which defends the right of East Timorese self-determination will have important consequences on the international scene. Sadly, the record so far has not been good ... as you all know. Despite a party policy which supports East Timorese self-determination, the government has failed to affirm that this right remains. Our actions have been virtually indistinguishable from those of our predecessors.

In some ways that is not surprising because the advice on how to act is coming from the same people who advised the Fraser Government. At the United Nations you find that our Representatives there are the very people who played a key role in the betrayal of the East Timorese in 1975. We should not be saving Indonesia's face, but that is what we are doing ... at the expense of our own.

****

In the forthcoming months, attention will be focussed on the lead-up to the July National Conference of the A.L.P. Undoubtedly, there will be moves to weaken party policy on East Timor. There is, however, strong feeling within the party on the issue and there will be support for the maintenance or strengthening of existing policy. National Conference support for East Timorese self-determination, in 1984, will make it much more difficult for the Government to duck and weave its way around that principle. Clear statements on the issue from a broad range of community organisations, discussion of resolutions at State Conferences and information to National Conference delegates will all be required to ensure a positive result in July.

In this context, I believe there would be profit in a visit to Australia by Jose Ramos Horta if it can be arranged. Horta became very well known in Australia as an advocate for East Timorese self-determination well before the brutal annexation of his country. He is still very well known and respected here. His return to Australia would be a way of letting people here know that there has been no let-up on the part of the Timorese. His visit just might prick the conscience of some of the leaders of our community whose support for East Timor has waned in recent times. Remember that it is only just over twelve months since many leading members of my party signed a petition to the United Nations supporting the right of the East Timorese to self-determination.

Within the party, as well as in the community, it is fairly clear that the report of the Australian Parliamentary delegation to East Timor will be used to claim that self-determination is no longer an issue. This needs to be properly refuted. As I said in my dissenting report, the Delegation's Report will entice many of those who read it towards certain conclusions which will not necessarily be justified by the experiences of the Delegation. That has clearly happened in media treatment of the report. It is very easy to demonstrate that the delegation

was never able to canvass the views of the East Timorese on the central question .... that of self-determination. It is also worth pointing out that the report does confirm many of the claims that are made by the East Timorese. I will list some of them for you. The delegation reported that :

* The continued detention of people on Atauro is a human rights violation. Detainees there are being held against their will. Other violations of human rights have continued. (pp. 32,51,33)

* The resettlement program has been socially and economically disruptive. (p.75)

* Movement into and out of East Timor is controlled. Indonesian authorities have refused to let some people leave the territory. This is a denial of their human rights. (p.33)

* Mail into and out of East Timor is censored. (p.33)

* There is a continuing need for food supplementation programs by international relief agencies. (p.68) Food problems still exist and are the priority concern of the civil administration. (p.67)

In addition to these points, the delegation judged that international interest will remain in East Timor until personal rights and freedoms are restored. (p.15) It stated that international Red Cross should have access to all detention centres in East Timor. (p.33) The delegation believed that the Australian Government should continue to raise human rights issues with Jakarta where clear evidence of breaches is available. (p.34) It is this type of material in the delegation's Report that must be highlighted ... especially for National Conference delegates who may try to hide behind the apparent thrust of the Report instead of facing the facts.

****

I would like to conclude with a comment on the way in which we put our arguments to people on this issue ... whether they be representatives of governments or delegates to the National Conference. We do not have to defend ourselves to explain why we support the East Timorese. We should put the burden on those who try to escape from their responsibilities to support and work for respect for international laws. Professor Roger Clark's arguments on the illegality of the Indonesian takeover should be known by all of us and emphasised. We should insist that if there is no respect for human rights ... there is absolutely no chance of peace. To do nothing to halt the violation of human rights is equally as reprehensible as committing the crime itself.

Thank you.

(END)

MELBOURNE
28th JANUARY, 1984.